Medford 23 June 1853

My dear Sir

The ground, taken by Dr Gannett, at Springfield in 1850, in reference to "the Fugitive Slave Law" was, - not "obedience to the Law" - but the "non-consideration of the subject." -

My motion was, "That the Committee on business be requested to take, into their consideration, the Fugitive Slave law, and report to the Convention a Resolution, expression of their opinion as to what it is the duty of Christian Ministers to do in relation to that Law". →

The adoption of this motion was opposed by Dr Gannett, very warmly, on this ground especially, that "the subject lies entirely outside of

the circle that circumscribes the objects & purposes of these autumnal Conventions. That these are chiefly the consideration and discussion of great theological questions, and matters relating to the practical duties & details of our profession; — and that we depart entirely from our field of duty, in ~~conducting~~ bringing up, before the Convention, questions of a political nature, which will be sure to excite bitter political feelings and destroy the harmony & Christian Character of the Convention —

To this my reply was that, agreeing entirely with Dr Garnett, as to the general objects of these Conventions this is a matter that lies entirely within the circle that circumscribes them: — for, first as to "Theological questions" this is one that, in the logical chain,

lies, but two links off from the first great question in Theology; namely, "Is there a God?" — For, if there is a God, He, as God, must be the Supreme Lawgiver of the Universe; and, if so, His laws are paramount to all others, and all others must give place to His. — If, — to begin at the other end of the chain — there is no higher law than the laws of Congress, then there is no higher Law-giving power than Congress, and if there is no higher Lawgiver than Congress, then there is no God, and that is bald, stark naked Atheism. Then, Secondly, as to the practical professional duty ~~of~~ ~~[illegible]~~ of ministers. If the laws of God are paramount to or higher than the highest law of man — it appears to me, that it is our part of the duty of our profession to day so from our pulpits: i. e. to

say,
when the laws of Congress or any other legislative body, conflict with, or run counter to, the laws of God they must not be obeyed by Christian men; come what may come, as the consequence of our refusal to obey. — I remarked that I did not ask the opinion of the Committee or of the Convention, for my own guidance, for my mind was made up as to my own course; but I wished the world to know what ground, in that respect, would be taken by the body of the Methodist Clergy, as represented in that Convention. —

That is the difference between Dr Garrett & myself, at the Springfield convention of 1850. —

(— I would add, tho' not embraced in your inquiry, — that, because I took that ground at Springfield, and but

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sequently, at the May Ministerial Conference, at Watertown Chapel in 1851, — Dr Gannett, had the frankness to say to me distinctly, on the day of the July visitation of the Cambridge Theological School, — that he should not care to exchange pulpits with me again. —

(George E. Ellis)

Brother Ellis, of Charlestown, who heard him say this, remarked "Why, brother Gannett, you would not surrender a fugitive slave, who should come to your house and ask protection!" — Ans. "I don't know, brother Ellis. My friends and parishioners (or my friends, of my parish) who know much more than you and I do of the state of feeling at the South, tell me that they have no doubt, that, if that law is not enforced, the Union will be dissolved." — I made

no reply. I was made so heart sick that I could say nothing: so find that the only one, of my Boston brethren that had sat upon my Ecclesiastical Council, supported by their own Congregation, that had ever offered me an exchange, after having unanimously come to the Result that they saw no reason for recommending a dissolution of my Connexion with my Church in Boston — that she should at last decline making an exchange with me, that he had himself proffered me, and that, because I had taken the ground that the laws of God are supreme and must override all human laws that oppose them; — and that, in my opinion it was the duty of a minister of Christ to say so; — made me so sick at heart — that I opened not my mouth. I could it

It seemed as if my last old friend had failed me, and turned from me, because of the very thing for which he should have loved me the better, and clung the closer to me.—

Excuse me, I pray you, Brother May, for bringing up before you this painful moment of my personal Experience of the power of Cotton & Commerce over the Convictions and consciences of devoted, Earnest and excellent ministers of Jesus Christ.—

Well — "Nemo omnibus horis sapit." — We, — all of us have our weak points. — I am not exempt from mine, — There are temptations that have been too strong for me, and that may be again. — May God have mercy on us all. —

Very truly Yrs

H. Verpont

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